

# The New Classical Vision of Dai Zhen in Eighteenth-Century China

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How did Dai Zhen systematically portray the classical world? When did this depiction start to emerge? In my earlier work, *China's Transition to Modernity: The New Classical Vision of Dai Zhen*, I analyzed the development of Dai Zhen's scholarly pursuits amidst the conflict between Chinese intellectuals and Jesuit missionaries. This book has been translated into Chinese and will be published by the end of 2023. However, despite what the subtitle suggests, I did not delve deeply and comprehensively into Dai Zhen's new vision of the classical world.

Common interpretations highlight *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* (*An Evidential Analysis of the Meaning of Terms in the Mencius*) as the core of Dai Zhen's philosophical work. I contend that this standard view overlooks Dai's new vision, which encompasses his overall classical scholarship, crystallized in his later years, and a comprehensive reevaluation of his lifelong exploration of the cosmos, the Confucian scriptures, and the new idea of individuality. *Mengzi ziyi shuzheng* was a critical step in departing from Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism. The true genesis of his classical vision lies in the *Petite Summaries of Seven Classics* (*Qijing xiaoji*). It appears that Dai Zhen began contemplating this grand scheme around 1757, but it was not until 1773 that he could start actualizing it in the. The systemic and comprehensive description of the classical world was incomplete due to his untimely death in 1777.

Although Dai only finished two texts, *On Goodness* (*Yuanshan*) and *On Cosmological Phenomena* (*Yuanxiang*), and made initial drafts of the third, *Records of Waterways on Spherical Earth* (*Shuidiji*), my work will expand upon the detailed systemization found in *On Cosmological Phenomena*. I will demonstrate how *Records of Waterways on Spherical Earth* shares this intricate systemization and provides geographical indexes to the *Petite Summaries of Seven Classics* Confucian historical and temporal textuality. In undertaking this project, I aim to re-envision Dai Zhen's classical perspectives and propose a new intellectual trajectory as indicated in Dai's unfinished work *Petite Summaries of Seven Classics*. This approach is intended to revitalize Confucian discourses in the modern world.